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### **Drives And Ego Mechanism: Psychodynamic Dimensions of The Parent-Child Bond in Preeti Shenoy's Works**

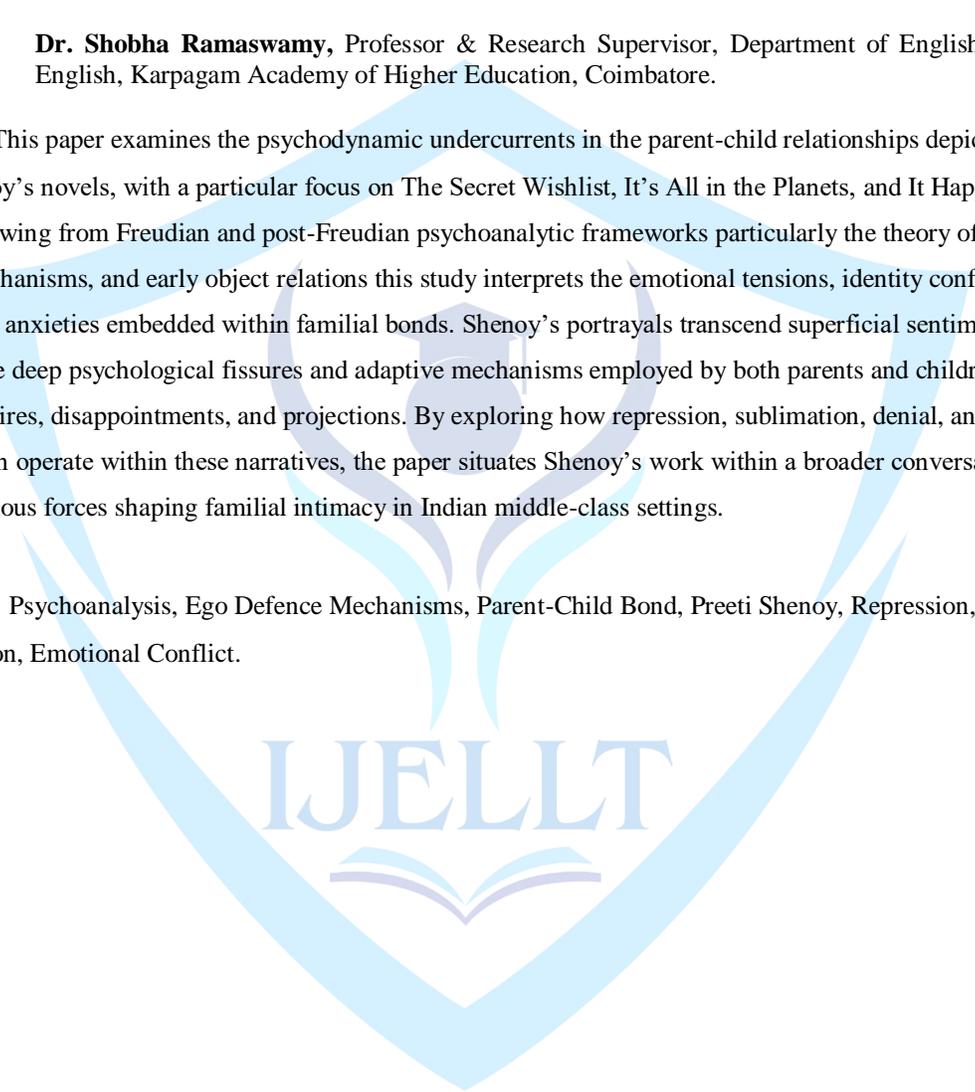
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**Abstract:** This paper examines the psychodynamic undercurrents in the parent-child relationships depicted in Preeti Shenoy's novels, with a particular focus on *The Secret Wishlist*, *It's All in the Planets*, and *It Happens for a Reason*. Drawing from Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalytic frameworks particularly the theory of drives, ego defence mechanisms, and early object relations this study interprets the emotional tensions, identity conflicts, and unconscious anxieties embedded within familial bonds. Shenoy's portrayals transcend superficial sentimentality, revealing the deep psychological fissures and adaptive mechanisms employed by both parents and children as they navigate desires, disappointments, and projections. By exploring how repression, sublimation, denial, and identification operate within these narratives, the paper situates Shenoy's work within a broader conversation about the unconscious forces shaping familial intimacy in Indian middle-class settings.

**Keywords:** Psychoanalysis, Ego Defence Mechanisms, Parent-Child Bond, Preeti Shenoy, Repression, Drives, Indian Fiction, Emotional Conflict.

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## Introduction

Indian popular fiction often sentimentalizes the family as a moral and emotional unit. However, in the works of Preeti Shenoy, the parent-child relationship is presented as a complex site of psychological negotiation. Beneath the veneer of affection lie suppressed resentments, guilt, idealization, and control phenomena that demand a deeper psychodynamic examination. As Freud proposed, unconscious drives significantly influence behaviour more than conscious intention. His theory of the structural model, which includes the id, ego, and superego, offers a foundational approach to understanding character motivation. When applied to Shenoy's fiction, it becomes clear that parent-child relationships are driven not only by cultural expectations but also by unconscious mechanisms such as repression, denial, and projection.

For instance, in *The Secret Wishlist*, the mother represses her romantic past and projects her internal guilt onto her daughter, creating a moral framework that is more psychological than ethical. Similarly, in *It's All in the Planets*, Aniket's mother unconsciously denies his autonomy, resulting in a subtle emotional manipulation masked as care. Meanwhile, *It Happens for a Reason* explores role reversal and ego adaptation as a single mother navigates identity and motherhood. This paper seeks to foreground these psychodynamic dimensions by applying Freudian concepts to Shenoy's characterization. Rather than viewing familial tensions as narrative devices, this study interprets them as representations of unconscious conflict. As Anna Freud and Melanie Klein suggest, defense mechanisms are not merely pathologies they are everyday strategies for emotional survival. Thus, through Shenoy's literary lens, the Indian family emerges not just as a cultural construct but as a psychic battlefield where identity, obligation, and desire collide.

## Review of Literature

Preeti Shenoy has carved a distinct space in Indian popular fiction by focusing on emotionally layered female protagonists who navigate the challenges of marriage, motherhood, autonomy, and desire. Critics have noted her skill in rendering emotional realism within the framework of middle-class Indian life. According to Vinitha Ramesh (2020), Shenoy's novels portray "women in transition," reflecting both the external pressures and internal struggles they face. However, much of this appreciation remains at the surface level, emphasizing plot dynamics, romantic progression, or feminist reorientation over deeper psychological readings. What is often overlooked is that these emotions are not merely situational but deeply embedded in early relational patterns and unconscious familial scripts.

Shenoy's protagonists are not just reacting to social norms they are also reenacting unresolved emotional conflicts from their formative years. Their anxieties, coping behaviors, and emotional paralysis reveal rich undercurrents of psychological repression and transference. This offers fertile ground for psychodynamic analysis, especially concerning the role of mothers, guilt, silence, and self-denial in shaping identity. While Shenoy's fiction has garnered attention from gender studies, cultural criticism, and popular media reviewers, very little academic work has addressed her narratives through a psychoanalytic lens. Literary scholarship has largely focused on her portrayal of women's empowerment, emotional resilience, and modern relationship dynamics. These discussions, though valuable, tend to sidestep the unconscious dimensions of character motivation such as internalized guilt, anxiety, and projection that are often central to the narrative arcs. This oversight is surprising, considering how deeply Shenoy's stories engage with familial structures, childhood memory, and suppressed emotional life. The absence of psychoanalytic readings has left a gap in our understanding of her work's emotional architecture. This paper aims to fill that void by reading Shenoy not just as a chronicler of contemporary domestic life, but as a subtle excavator of the human psyche.

The present study is anchored in classical and post-Freudian psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud's model of the psyche the id, ego, and superego provides a foundation for examining the inner tensions experienced by Shenoy's characters. Freud's theories on repression, sublimation, and the role of drives (Eros and Thanatos) are especially relevant when analyzing how characters internalize and externalize emotional conflict. Anna Freud's work, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (1936), deepens this analysis by detailing how defenses such as denial, projection, and rationalization help individuals manage anxiety and maintain psychological equilibrium. Melanie Klein's concept of object relations how early emotional bonds with caregivers shape internal self-structures offers insights into the enduring influence of childhood on adult relationships. Donald Winnicott's theory of the false self is particularly illuminating when studying characters like Aniket or Diksha, who perform roles shaped by parental expectations while suppressing their authentic desires. Margaret Mahler's separation-individuation theory is also central in understanding the emotional ambivalence in adult children who are caught between love, guilt, and autonomy.

Ego defenses in Shenoy's works are not only psychological tools but narrative engines. Characters often behave in ways that seem irrational on the surface but reveal logical consistency when viewed through the lens of defense mechanisms. For instance, repression leads to emotional silences and delays in self-expression, which in turn drive the plot forward. Denial and projection lead to interpersonal conflict, which fuels both thematic tension and character development. These mechanisms are deeply embedded in the structure of the stories unspoken expectations, unacknowledged pain, and subconscious resistance all shape character arcs. The narrative does not merely depict emotional growth; it maps the journey of the ego navigating a minefield of internal and external demands. By highlighting these patterns, Shenoy's novels can be situated within a broader tradition of psychodynamic fiction literature that foregrounds the unconscious as a primary narrative force.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The psychodynamic approach provides a nuanced lens through which to examine the emotional, unconscious, and relational structures that define the parent-child bonds in Preeti Shenoy's fiction. By using Freudian and post-Freudian theory, particularly in the domains of ego psychology and object relations, this section lays the groundwork for interpreting how internal psychic mechanisms shape characters' behaviors and familial relationships.

Sigmund Freud's structural model divides the psyche into three interacting components: the id, ego, and superego. The id houses the instinctual drives and desires (e.g., libido, aggression), functioning according to the pleasure principle. The ego, operating on the reality principle, mediates between the desires of the id and the constraints of the external world. The superego embodies internalized social norms, parental expectations, and moral judgment. In Shenoy's novels, the parent-child relationship often represents a site where these three components clash. For instance, when a character desires autonomy or romantic freedom but is restrained by internal guilt or family pressure, it is a reflection of the ego struggling to balance id-driven impulses with superego-imposed restrictions. This tension is central to the protagonists' emotional journeys, particularly as they negotiate parental authority, societal norms, and personal identity.

The poor ego...serves three severe masters and does what it can to bring their claims and demands into harmony with one another. The three tyrants are the external world, the superego, and the id. It has to reconcile the claims and demands of all three... The ego is not only harassed by the external world; it is also bullied by the superego, like a garrison in a captured city, and it finds itself a helpless plaything for the id. (New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis 131)

Defense mechanisms are unconscious strategies employed by the ego to reduce anxiety and protect the psyche from internal conflict or external threat. These mechanisms are not inherently pathological; rather, they are essential tools for navigating emotional stress, especially within the family unit. Repression involves burying unwanted desires or memories in the unconscious. Characters like Diksha repress their own needs to maintain harmony with familial expectations. Projection attributes one's unacceptable feelings to others. Parental characters often project their own past regrets or repressed desires onto their children, leading to moral overreach or restrictive parenting. Denial is a refusal to accept a painful reality, evident in characters who ignore emotional truths about their family dynamics. Displacement shifts emotional responses from a threatening object to a safer one, for example, when frustration with a parent manifests in overreacting to a peer or child. Sublimation redirects socially unacceptable impulses into constructive activities, such as art, dance, or writing. Shenoy uses this mechanism to portray healing and transformation. Idealization exaggerates the positive qualities of others to avoid acknowledging negative feelings, a common phenomenon in parent-child loyalty conflicts. These mechanisms appear throughout Shenoy's narratives as both psychological symptoms and narrative strategies, subtly guiding the reader through each character's internal terrain.

Object relations theory, particularly developed by Melanie Klein and later by Donald Winnicott, emphasizes that early relationships, especially with caregivers, form the template for how individuals relate to others and themselves throughout life. The "object" in this context refers to a significant person, usually a parent, who becomes internalized as part of the child's emotional world. In Shenoy's fiction, the parent often acts as both nurturer and jailer, a figure of affection and control. This duality reflects what Klein describes as the paranoid-schizoid position, where the object is split into good and bad parts. Shenoy's characters frequently shift between gratitude and resentment toward their parents, showing that they have not fully integrated these ambivalent feelings.

Margaret Mahler's theory of separation-individuation is particularly relevant in examining adult children's attempts to assert autonomy while remaining emotionally bound to their parents.

The process of separation-individuation... is never completed once and for all. While its earliest phase belongs to the infant's second half-year, and its completion is ideally achieved by the end of the third year, certain tasks involved in individuation—such as the capacity to maintain a sense of self in the face of conflicting emotional demands—must be repeatedly negotiated throughout life. Inadequate resolution of these early stages often leads to later difficulties with autonomy, identity, and interpersonal relationships.

(The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant 75)

Characters like Aniket, for example, experience conflict when their desire for independence is inhibited by internalized guilt or parental over-involvement. These psychological patterns are indicative of stalled individuation; a developmental delay rooted in unresolved familial dependency. In the Indian middle-class context, family is not just a social institution, it is a site of emotional allegiance, moral training, and lifelong duty. These cultural scripts often demand self-sacrifice, obedience, and the suppression of personal desire in the name of familial harmony.

Freud's superego becomes particularly intensified in such settings, as parental expectations are deeply woven into the child's moral consciousness. The internalization of these expectations leads to chronic guilt, repression of desires, and conflict between the individual's need for freedom and the family's demand for conformity. Shenoy's fiction reflects this psychological tension vividly. Her protagonists are often caught between the cultural imperative to "be good" and the personal yearning to "be free." This dual pull leads to defense mechanisms that preserve the social self while fracturing the inner self. Dance, writing, romance, or even silence become modes through which these characters attempt to reclaim their authentic identity without completely breaking from cultural norms.

## International Journal of English Literature and Methodology

### Literary Theories

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretative research design grounded in psychoanalytic literary criticism. The primary corpus comprises three of Preeti Shenoy's novels, *The Secret Wishlist* (2012), *It's All in the Planets* (2016), and *It Happens for a Reason* (2014) selected for their sustained exploration of parent-child relationships within contemporary Indian middle-class settings. These texts are subjected to close textual analysis to identify narrative patterns, character behaviours, and relational dynamics that reveal latent psychological processes.

The analysis is informed by a psychoanalytic theoretical framework that draws upon both classical and post-Freudian concepts. Sigmund Freud's structural model of the psyche (id, ego, and superego), theory of drives (Eros and Thanatos), and mechanisms of defence (repression, projection, denial, sublimation, displacement, idealisation) provide the foundational lens for examining unconscious conflicts and ego negotiations. Complementing Freud, Anna Freud's elaboration of ego-defence strategies, Melanie Klein's object-relations theory, Donald Winnicott's concept of the false self, and Margaret Mahler's separation-individuation paradigm offers additional tools for interpreting the enduring influence of early caregiver bonds on adult identity formation.

The methodological procedure involves a thematic and psycho-textual mapping of key episodes, dialogues, and character trajectories against these theoretical constructs. Rather than merely cataloguing overt plot events, the analysis foregrounds latent content, symbolic motifs, and narrative silences to illuminate the unconscious drives and adaptive mechanisms embedded within familial interactions. Secondary sources, including existing critical scholarship on Shenoy's fiction and psychoanalytic theory, are engaged to contextualise findings and to support triangulation of interpretations. By integrating literary hermeneutics with psychoanalytic inquiry, this methodology seeks to reveal the deep psychodynamic dimensions of the parent-child bond that undergirds Shenoy's narrative architecture.

### **Parent-Child Dynamics in Preeti Shenoy's Novels: A Psychodynamic Reading**

Preeti Shenoy's *The Secret Wishlist* presents a powerful psychological portrait of a young woman, Diksha, whose emotional trajectory is deeply shaped by the parental gaze particularly that of her mother. Beneath the surface of a traditionally "supportive" household lies a pattern of emotional repression, moral control, and inherited guilt, all of which echo Freudian and post-Freudian ideas on unconscious conflict, ego defenses, and psychic inheritance. Diksha's mother serves as the novel's unconscious enforcer of tradition. Outwardly, she appears nurturing, but her parenting is marked by fear, rigidity, and unspoken moral codes. According to Anna Freud, denial is the ego's mechanism for rejecting a painful reality. The mother's extreme caution about romance and personal freedom reveals not just concern but the denial of her own youthful desires and regrets. "You'll ruin your life if you go out with boys," her mother warns a phrase steeped more in suppressed memory than in maternal wisdom. The harshness in her judgment suggests that the real threat is not her daughter's behavior but the echo of her own forbidden past. This reflects Freud's notion of "return of the repressed", where buried emotions reemerge through disproportionate reactions to seemingly minor events.

Diksha's character is shaped by long-term repression, which Freud defines as the "involuntary exclusion of painful thoughts or desires from consciousness." Her passive obedience, lack of assertiveness, and emotional detachment in marriage indicate an ego caught in the crossfire between the id's natural drives and the superego's inherited moralism. "There were days I felt invisible. As though I had ceased to exist as a person and become a role." This line reflects the false self, a term used by Donald Winnicott to describe a persona that emerges to please others at the cost of authentic selfhood. Diksha has not merely adapted; she has emotionally disappeared, sacrificing desire, joy, and identity for the illusion of stability. Her guilt is not always overt, but internalized moralistic pressure renders her emotionally paralyzed. Her inability to even identify what she wants stems from ego fragmentation, where the true self has been silenced under layers of social conditioning and maternal expectation.

The mother-daughter dynamic in *The Secret Wishlist* is driven by projection, wherein the mother displaces her own buried impulses onto her daughter. In psychoanalytic terms, this is a defense mechanism that allows one to maintain a sense of moral superiority by externalizing forbidden desires. "You're being reckless. Just like Shalini's daughter, who brought shame on her family." This generalization reveals not just anxiety but projected shame. The "recklessness" she fears is not based on observation of Diksha's behavior but is rooted in the unconscious projection of her own youthful guilt. The daughter becomes a screen onto which the mother paints the anxieties she cannot confront within herself. This aligns with Klein's object relations theory, where early parental figures become internalized "objects" whose emotions and unresolved conflicts shape the child's psychic life.

In Freudian theory, sublimation is a mature defense mechanism wherein unacceptable impulses are transformed into socially acceptable or creative expressions. For Diksha, the rediscovery of dance represents a return to the authentic self, the one that existed before repression set in. "When I danced, I was myself. Not someone's wife, someone's mother. Just me." Dance becomes a psychic act of integration, allowing her fragmented ego to unify around a passion that is both personal and symbolic. What was once taboo in the eyes of her mother becomes a form of liberation, a reconnection with the libidinal drive (Eros) that Freud saw as essential to vitality and creativity. Sublimation here is not merely aesthetic it is therapeutic. Through movement, Diksha gives expression to what was silenced in speech. The act of dancing allows the return of the repressed in a constructive and healing form, paving the way for individuation and emotional freedom.

Preeti Shenoy's *It's All in the Planets* presents a subtler, more domesticated version of parent-child dynamics, particularly through the emotional bond between Aniket and his widowed mother. At first glance, the relationship seems nurturing and benign; however, closer psychoanalytic scrutiny reveals an underlying pattern of emotional enmeshment, denial, and idealization, which inhibits Aniket's individuation. The text becomes a microcosm of Indian middle-class emotional life, where care often veils control and guilt displaces autonomy. Aniket's mother is affectionate and attentive but simultaneously intrudes on every detail of his adult life his clothing choices, his diet, his romantic interests. This intrusion stems from more than maternal concern; it is a manifestation of denial, a defense mechanism described by Anna Freud as the ego's unconscious refusal to accept painful realities. "She thinks she knows best. About my clothes, my friends, even my coffee."

This seemingly humorous remark carries deeper implications. The mother has constructed her identity around Aniket. In the absence of her spouse and in a society that offers little emotional validation to widows, her son becomes a substitute emotional anchor. Denial functions here to repress the unbearable reality of emotional emptiness and widowhood. Rather than confronting her own grief, she displaces her unfulfilled emotional needs onto Aniket, thereby preserving the illusion of purpose and control. This aligns with object-relations theory, which holds that unresolved early losses or traumas often result in over-attachment to a later "object" (in this case, Aniket). The mother's refusal to see her son as an autonomous adult is not cruelty, it is a psychic defense.

While Aniket is aware of his mother's interference, he does not resist it aggressively. Instead, he idealizes her: "She's selfless and strong. She sacrificed everything for me." This is classic idealization, where exaggerated positive traits are attributed to a loved one to suppress ambivalence. According to Nancy McWilliams, idealization is often used "to prevent feelings of guilt or betrayal that might arise from confronting a loved one's flaws." Aniket's psyche is divided. On one side lies the ego's need for independence, on the other, the superego's guilt internalized from the parent whenever separation is attempted. This results in a psychological double-bind. He wants to be free, yet feels disloyal for even contemplating it.

Idealization is a defense against the recognition of disappointment or rage. It allows people to preserve an illusion of safety in important relationships by exaggerating the goodness of the other person, thereby forestalling feelings of danger or betrayal. In many families, especially those in which emotional loyalty is equated with obedience or gratitude, acknowledging resentment or dissatisfaction may feel like a form of emotional treason. (Nancy McWilliams, *Psychoanalytic Diagnosis* 94)

This mirrors Mahler's separation-individuation phase, in which an adult child must differentiate from the caregiver to form a stable identity. Aniket's struggle is emblematic of individuals caught between cultural expectations of filial piety and personal emotional evolution. Throughout the novel, Aniket negotiates his emotions like someone caught in a quiet storm. He is not actively rebellious, but his discomfort is palpable. His ego attempts to balance love (id-driven attachment), duty (superego's command to please the parent), and autonomy (ego's desire for individual identity). "Sometimes I feel like I'm still sixteen around her. Like I need permission to breathe." This line is key it reflects emotional claustrophobia, where familial closeness becomes stifling. The conflict is not born from overt abuse or neglect but from emotional fusion, which leaves no space for the self to grow. This is often seen in enmeshed families, where boundaries are blurred and individuation is experienced as betrayal.

The ego, in this case, resorts to compromise formations Aniket delays decisions, avoids confrontation, and maintains a passive persona to avoid inner guilt and outer conflict. But this comes at a cost.

The most significant fallout of this dynamic is Aniket's emotional confusion in his romantic relationships. He struggles to assert what he wants, often mirroring his mother's expectations instead of listening to his internal voice. This results in emotional paralysis a form of ego depletion, where the energy needed for independent action is drained by the need to uphold an idealized family image. "I sometimes wonder if I'm making choices, or if they're just being made for me." This self-reflection marks a pivotal moment of ego awakening the recognition that autonomy has been compromised under the illusion of duty. In Freudian terms, this is the emergence of the reality principle, where the ego begins to confront the false narratives constructed by the superego and denial mechanisms.

In *It Happens for a Reason*, Preeti Shenoy offers a departure from traditional portrayals of parent-child hierarchies. The protagonist, Vipasha (Vee), is a single mother navigating modern womanhood, societal judgment, and emotional self-reliance. This novel flips the psychodynamic script: instead of the child being emotionally burdened by the parent, it is the parent Vee who must both nurture and individuate, often projecting unresolved tensions onto her son, Aryan. Through this reversal, Shenoy explores how ego defenses, especially rationalization, reaction formation, and sublimation, shape a mother's psychic resilience and how children, too, develop early psychological adaptations in emotionally non-normative families.

Vee's journey is marked by choices that defy social expectations: having a child out of wedlock, raising him alone, and working in a non-traditional profession. These choices invite external judgment and internal conflict, often resolved through rationalization, a defense mechanism where unacceptable feelings or decisions are explained away with seemingly logical reasons. "It was better this way. I didn't want him to grow up in a loveless marriage." Such statements, while reasonable, conceal an emotional undercurrent of guilt, fear, and rejection. Rationalization here is a coping strategy an attempt to frame emotionally charged, socially condemned decisions in a light that preserves ego stability. In Freudian terms, Vee's ego mediates fiercely between the id (her desire for freedom, sexuality, ambition) and the superego (internalized cultural shame, especially regarding motherhood outside marriage). Her frequent internal dialogues reflect this negotiation.

In a reversal of traditional roles, Aryan often behaves like the stabilizing figure in the relationship a phenomenon aligned with role reversal or parentification. This dynamic, where the child assumes emotional or practical responsibilities beyond their developmental stage, has long-term psychological implications. "Sometimes I feel he's the one parenting me," Vee admits, half-jokingly. This dynamic reflects Winnicott's idea of the "caretaker self", formed when a child senses a parent's emotional fragility and adjusts their behavior to protect or support the adult. Aryan's maturity is admirable, but also symptomatic of a psychological burden. While Shenoy portrays this as empowering, a psychodynamic lens reveals the subtle costs: suppression of the child's own emotional needs, and potential difficulty forming age-appropriate attachments.

Though Vee is fiercely protective of Aryan, she often disguises fear as nonchalance, especially in emotionally vulnerable moments. This is classic reaction formation, a defense in which an unacceptable feeling (such as fear or guilt) is replaced with its opposite (confidence, detachment). “I’m fine, I’ve got this,” she insists, even as her internal monologue betrays insecurity. This defense preserves self-image and allows her to maintain her “strong mother” role, but at the expense of authentic emotional release. Like many of Shenoy’s protagonists, Vee carries unresolved wounds from her own parents especially her authoritarian father and masks her vulnerability as strength. The reaction formation serves to defend against regressive dependency and fear of abandonment.

One of the most empowering dimensions of Vee’s character is her dedication to fitness and wellness not only as a career but as a source of identity. This commitment functions as sublimation, transforming her emotional turmoil and need for control into a socially valuable and personally affirming endeavor. “The gym saved me. It gave me a place to breathe, to exist as myself.” In Freudian terms, sublimation is the redirection of libidinal energy into productive outlets. For Vee, fitness is not simply a job it is a symbolic space where she can reclaim autonomy, rewrite identity, and assert selfhood beyond the role of mother or daughter. This echoes *The Secret Wishlist*, where dance played a similar redemptive role.

Thus, Shenoy’s novels *The Secret Wishlist*, *It’s All in the Planets*, and *It Happens for a Reason* offer rich ground for exploring the interplay between unconscious drives, ego defenses, and identity formation within the framework of familial bonds. Each narrative, while distinct in plot and voice, reveals recurring psychodynamic patterns that bind characters across generations and genders. This section provides a comparative reading, identifying how repetition, defense mechanisms, and socio-cultural expectations collectively shape the parent-child relationship and the protagonist’s internal world.

Freud's concept of repetition compulsion the unconscious tendency to recreate familiar emotional scenarios emerges in all three novels. Whether through submissive silence (*The Secret Wishlist*), emotional compliance (*It's All in the Planets*), or premature maturity (*It Happens for a Reason*), characters are caught in cycles inherited from their parental figures. In *The Secret Wishlist*, Diksha's repression is a direct echo of her mother's unfulfilled youth; in *It's All in the Planets*, Aniket subconsciously mirrors his mother's emotional dependency by over-accommodating; and in *It Happens for a Reason*, Vee's hyper-independence reflects a psychological rebellion against her authoritarian father. These repetitions signal not conscious imitation but unconscious identification, where unresolved parental dynamics are internalized and reenacted.

Across Shenoy's work, mothers serve as emotionally dominant figures not only providers of care but gatekeepers of morality, tradition, and emotional codes. These maternal figures often shift between protective nurturers and projective enforcers, depending on their psychological makeup. Diksha's mother in *The Secret Wishlist* projects her own buried shame onto her daughter. Aniket's mother in *It's All in the Planets* idealizes her maternal role to deny her emotional loneliness. Vee, in *It Happens for a Reason*, internalizes both maternal and paternal functions, becoming both protector and inadvertent burden on Aryan. These figures align with Jungian archetypes, the "Great Mother" who nurtures and the "Terrible Mother" who consumes. Shenoy complicates this binary by showing that the same mother can embody both. This duality results in internalized conflict within the child, who must simultaneously seek approval and flee control. What makes Shenoy's narratives particularly rich for psychodynamic analysis is the way ego defenses are not only psychological strategies but structural tools they drive character arcs and shape narrative outcomes.

Indian middle-class culture, with its emphasis on obedience, familial duty, and gender conformity, serves as a powerful superego construct in Shenoy's work. Cultural scripts dictate what a "good" daughter, son, or mother should do. Shenoy's protagonists must navigate these moral imperatives while uncovering their repressed emotional truths. Each character's arc reveals a tension between cultural conditioning and individual awakening: Diksha's liberation is not just personal but symbolic breaking free from maternal superego. Aniket's struggle is quieter he does not rebel but begins to self-reflect, which marks the first step toward individuation. Vee's identity is forged through trial and resistance; she crafts a self not in opposition to culture, but alongside it.

In all three narratives, identity is shown as fluid and contested, shaped by drives, deflected by defences, and ultimately reimagined through consciousness and self-expression. Shenoy's protagonists demonstrate that true intimacy with self or others requires confrontation with the unconscious legacies we carry.

Preeti Shenoy's fiction, when analysed through a psychoanalytic lens, reveals a layered and emotionally intricate portrayal of the parent-child bond, particularly within the socio-cultural context of contemporary Indian middle-class families. Far from being sentimental or overtly moralistic, Shenoy's narratives expose the often-invisible psychological negotiations that take place beneath the surface of familial love. Her characters whether they are daughters seeking to reclaim their suppressed selves, sons struggling to separate love from emotional obligation, or mothers navigating their own unhealed wounds are constructed not simply through their actions, but through the deep psychic mechanisms that shape them.

Drawing from Freudian and post-Freudian frameworks, this study has shown how defense mechanisms such as repression, denial, projection, rationalization, and sublimation are not only psychological processes but also narrative devices. These defenses do more than shield the ego they drive the character arcs, sustain interpersonal conflicts, and ultimately mediate the journey toward self-awareness and transformation. In *The Secret Wishlist*, repression and projection govern both maternal control and filial silence until expression becomes the key to identity. In *It's All in the Planets*, idealization and denial maintain a false sense of familial harmony while concealing the psychological cost of emotional enmeshment. And in *It Happens for a Reason*, rationalization and sublimation emerge as adaptive tools through which the protagonist asserts independence, despite role reversals and societal judgment. What unites these narratives is Shenoy's nuanced attention to the unconscious forces that shape love, duty, guilt, and self-perception. Her work challenges the idealized notion of the Indian family as purely nurturing, instead depicting it as a dynamic psychic space where emotional truths are often buried under cultural scripts. Yet, Shenoy also offers a hopeful trajectory through consciousness, artistic expression, and boundary-making, her protagonists move from psychic fragmentation toward integration.

By foregrounding internal conflict, familial repetition, and the subtle tyranny of the superego, Shenoy situates her novels within a broader tradition of psychodynamic literature stories that understand emotion not just as sentiment, but as symptom. Her contribution, therefore, is not only literary but psychological, offering a mirror to the unconscious lives we live within our most intimate relationships.

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